

Quality Assessment of IDRC Evaluation Reports

April 2010

Although evaluation reports are only one element of IDRC's evaluation system and do not represent the entirety of evaluation activities, they are an important element of IDRC's knowledge system. In order to monitor the quality of the evaluation reports and identify areas for improvement, IDRC's Evaluation Unit conducts regular reviews of the quality of all evaluation reports commissioned by the Centre. An electronic copy of all evaluation reports should be forwarded to the Evaluation Unit for inclusion in the inventory.

IDRC maintains a decentralized evaluation system in which programming units and regional offices are responsible for planning, conducting and utilizing evaluations of their projects and programs as needed. Besides conducting strategic evaluations of cross-cutting issues, developing methodologies, and supporting projects, the Evaluation Unit also acts as a resource for programming units by facilitating evaluation planning and implementation, providing technical assistance and feedback, supporting and giving trainings and workshops, and offering logistical and methodological support. In special cases, the Evaluation Unit can itself manage or implement an evaluation for a programming unit.

In this decentralized, use-oriented evaluation system there is a natural tension between evaluation's role in supporting program learning and demonstrating accountability for achieving results. In order to maintain the balance between learning and accountability in such a system, it is neither feasible nor desirable to standardize quality through the creation of a single format, approach or methodology to which all evaluation reports must adhere. Instead, the Evaluation Unit judges the quality of an evaluation report based on the degree to which it demonstrates that the evaluation has fulfilled the purpose for which it was conducted using 4 internationally recognized program standards: utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy

How is Quality assessed?

According to the regional evaluation associations in Africa, Canada, and the United States, these 4 quality enhancement standards are intended to help ensure that an evaluation will:

- serve the information needs of intended users and be owned by stakeholders (utility);
- be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal (feasibility);
- be conducted legally, ethically and with due regard to the welfare of those involved in the evaluation as well as those affected by its results (propriety); and,
- reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the program being evaluated (accuracy).

The reviewer of an evaluation is guided by a set of questions that are designed to elicit information about each of the four dimensions of evaluation quality (see Table 1 opposite).

How is information about the Quality of Evaluation Used?

To provide feedback to programming units on their evaluation activities

The process of reviewing the quality of program-led evaluations conducted by program initiatives, corporate projects, regional offices, and other groups in the Centre enhances the

ability of the Evaluation Unit to provide effective support to programs and regional offices by providing a common set of criteria against which the quality of any evaluation can be judged. The process of systematically reviewing, analysing, and recording particular aspects of evaluation reports ensures that Evaluation Unit staff are well-equipped when providing feedback and technical support to programming units in their evaluation activities. It also allows the Evaluation Unit to monitor Centre-wide quality trends, which can signal the Evaluation Unit to provide training or other interventions to ensure IDRC staff have the skills and tools required to conduct, commission, and use quality evaluations.

In the Evaluation Unit's annual reporting to Senior Management Committee and the Board of Governors

Assessing the quality of all evaluation reports against a common framework generates data that can be aggregated, permitting a review of the overall quality of submitted evaluations. Beginning in 2002, an assessment of the quality of evaluation reports was presented in the Annual Corporate Evaluation (ACE) Report to IDRC's Senior Management and the Board of Governors. The ACE Reports are available on the Evaluation Unit's website (www.idrc.ca/evaluation).

Table 1. Questions Guiding the Quality Assessment of Evaluation Reports

1. UTILITY The utility standard intends to ensure that an evaluation will serve the information needs of the intended user(s) of the evaluation.				
1.1 Were the users identified? Yes / No The report should clearly identify the primary intended user(s) (PIU) of the evaluation. PIUs are in a position to make decisions about the evaluation, and they intend to use the evaluation process or findings to inform their decisions or actions. A user is different from the audience of the evaluation. A user is more specific and requires an action on their part. The audience is interested in the evaluation but has a more passive relationship with it than the primary intended user(s).				
1.2 Were the uses identified? Yes / No The report should clearly identify the intended uses of evaluation. “Use concerns how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experience the evaluation process” (Patton 2002). Examples of different ways evaluations findings are used to 1) make overall judgments; 2) facilitate improvements; and 3) generate knowledge. The ways in which user(s) are engaged in the evaluative process can also be used. Examples of process uses include: 1) enhancing shared understanding; 2) supporting and reinforcing the program intervention; 3) increasing engagement, self-determination and ownership; and 4) program and organizational development.				
1.3. Did the report describe how users participated in the evaluation process? Yes / No Ranking : 1 2 3 <table border="1"><tr><td>Users fully participated in the evaluation</td><td>Users somewhat participated in the evaluation</td><td>Users did not participate in the evaluation.</td></tr></table>	Users fully participated in the evaluation	Users somewhat participated in the evaluation	Users did not participate in the evaluation.	
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	2. FEASIBILITY The feasibility standard intends to ensure that an evaluation will be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal.			
	2.1 Were the evaluation issues/questions identified? Yes / No Appropriate evaluation questions that will be answered in the evaluation should be clearly outlined in the report.			
	2.2 Given what could have been done in the evaluation, was the design of the evaluation adequate to address those issues/questions? Yes / No / Insufficient detail to assess The design of the evaluation should be realistic and practical. It should be able to yield sufficient evidence and information to answer/respond to the evaluation questions/issues identified in the report.			
	3. ACCURACY The accuracy standard intends to ensure that an evaluation will reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the program being evaluated.			
	3.1 Given what was actually done in the evaluation, did the evaluation use appropriate tools and methods? Yes / No / Insufficient detail to assess Ranking : 1 2 3 <table border="1"><tr><td>The evaluation used completely appropriate tools and methods.</td><td>The evaluation used some appropriate tools and methods.</td><td>Inappropriate tools and methods were used in the evaluation.</td></tr></table>	The evaluation used completely appropriate tools and methods.	The evaluation used some appropriate tools and methods.	Inappropriate tools and methods were used in the evaluation.
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	The tool and methods used in the evaluation should be outlined in the report, particularly explaining their appropriateness, relative to the evaluator’s primary purpose, the manner in which the evaluation questions will be answered, use(s) and user(s). The report should justify the use of the selected method and identify both strengths and weaknesses relating to this method.			

<p>3.2 Did it apply the tools and methods well? Yes / No / Insufficient detail to assess Ranking : 1 2 3</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="516 1640 644 1906">All tools and methods were well applied in evaluation.</td> <td data-bbox="516 1371 644 1640">Some tools and methods were well applied in the evaluation.</td> <td data-bbox="516 1102 644 1371">None of the tools and methods were applied well.</td> </tr> </table> <p>The report should document how the tools and methods were applied. The tools and methods should have been appropriately designed for the evaluation, and applied in a way that generates rigorous, valid, and credible evidence to respond to the evaluation questions.</p> <p>3.3 Is the evidence presented in the report? Yes / No / Insufficient detail to assess Ranking : 1 2 3</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="911 1640 998 1906">The report presents sufficient evidence.</td> <td data-bbox="911 1371 998 1640">The report presents partial evidence in the report.</td> <td data-bbox="911 1102 998 1371">The report presents insufficient evidence.</td> </tr> </table> <p>The report should effectively, comprehensively and concisely present the evidence used to make the conclusions and answer the questions in the evaluation.</p> <p>3.4. Overall, does the evidence substantiate the conclusions/ recommendations? Yes / No / Insufficient detail to assess Ranking : 1 2 3</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="1203 1640 1386 1906">The evidence presented in the report fully substantiates the conclusions and recommendations</td> <td data-bbox="1203 1371 1386 1640">The evidence presented in the report somewhat substantiates the conclusions and recommendations</td> <td data-bbox="1203 1102 1386 1371">The evidence presented in the report does not substantiates the conclusions and recommendations</td> </tr> </table> <p>The conclusions and recommendations should flow logically from, and reflect the evidence. Recommendations should be clear, relevant and implementable.</p>	All tools and methods were well applied in evaluation.	Some tools and methods were well applied in the evaluation.	None of the tools and methods were applied well.	The report presents sufficient evidence.	The report presents partial evidence in the report.	The report presents insufficient evidence.	The evidence presented in the report fully substantiates the conclusions and recommendations	The evidence presented in the report somewhat substantiates the conclusions and recommendations	The evidence presented in the report does not substantiates the conclusions and recommendations	<p>4. PROPRIETY</p> <p>The propriety standard intends to ensure that an evaluation will be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results.</p> <p>4.1 Did any of the content of the evaluation report raise ethical concerns? Yes / No</p> <p>Propriety standards include the right of human subjects; respect for human dignity; the completion of a fair evaluation; disclosure of conflicts of interests, disclosure of results; etc.</p> <p>OVERALL ASSESSMENT</p> <p>The evaluation report is: Acceptable / Unacceptable</p> <p>Based on the above assessment of the evaluation standards, this section makes a final judgment whether the evaluation report is acceptable or unacceptable. If two or more of the quality dimensions are negative, the report is unacceptable.</p>
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